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ABSTRACT

The study of geography and culture are both essential to development of global awareness and multicultural perspective. The two can be integrated in secondary school instruction, with the result of enhancing each. Cross-disciplinary strategies and activities can be adapted to any course with a cultural component, including second language teaching. Five themes in geography serve as a basis for instruction: location (cartography and relationships with other places); place (physical and human characteristics); regions; relationships within places; and movement (migration and trade). Reductions in geography instruction support the need for integration of this subject with others. The integrative and global approach to education is occurring at a time when secondary teachers are reorganizing curricula to promote self-directed learning. At the same time, language educators are reassessing and reinforcing the role of culture in second language learning. Geography can serve as the foundation for discussion of many aspects of culture, especially through incorporation of the five themes of geography. (MSE)

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**Integrating Culture and Geography: Techniques
to Combat Ethnocentrism in the Foreign
Language Classroom**

Results of a 1988 survey conducted by the Gallup Organization and commissioned by the National Geographic Society reveal that Americans, in particular, are relatively inept at basic geography. A similar test given by the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), a congressionally mandated project, discloses equally disturbing statistics. Results showed specific areas of weakness, including one on cultural geography relating to economic and environmental issues. As a result, literally hundreds of articles have appeared in numerous newspapers and other publications in recent years describing the poor understanding that many Americans have of geography.

As we begin the new decade, educators of various disciplines are recognizing the pressing need for a geographically literate society. The study of geography is basic to the student's development of global awareness and multicultural perspectives. Moreover, it provides much of the terminology and units of analysis for discussion and comprehension of issues related to international education. In short, at all levels, geography can provide the skills to comprehend world issues, many of which have geographical

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implications.

Another way to ensure that students are developing better informed understanding and knowledge of global issues and conflicts is through the study of culture. Seeley (1984) points out that in today's world of high technology and instantaneous communication, there is a greater likelihood of conflicting value systems coming into contact. Ignorance of foreign cultures and feelings of ethnocentrism can only make matters worse.

In order to help students derive lasting benefits from their learning experience, I believe we can integrate the study of culture with the teaching of geography. With this approach the difficulties inherent to the teaching of culture can be lessened, and the appreciation of and interest in the study of geography can be heightened.

The main objective of this paper is to suggest ways to introduce and integrate meaningfully and effectively the concepts of basic themes of geography through the teaching of culture. Cross-disciplinary strategies and activities are offered to exemplify how the teaching of geography and culture interact. Although these activities have been developed for use in the foreign language classroom, they are easily adapted to any class which has a cultural component.

In 1982, a joint committee of the National Council for Geographic Education (NCGE) and the Association of American Geographers (AAG) created a set of guidelines for geography in schools. In the Guidelines for Education: Elementary and

Secondary Schools (1984) five geographic themes were identified as basic to all geographic understanding. These include: location, place, relationship within places, movement, and regions. Fig. 1 provides an outline of the five themes along with some of the questions and issues that each addresses.

This set of themes has been widely accepted by most

Fig.1

The Five Themes of Geography

LOCATION

Absolute

Where is it?

Latitude/Longitude?

Cartography

Remote sensing

Relative

How accessible is it?

Where is it in relation
to another place?

How does it affect
economy and culture?

PLACE

Physical Characteristics

Describe the environment

Animal life

Topography

Vegetation

Human Characteristics

Describe the people

Settlement patterns

Architecture

Transportation

Major attractions

Government

REGIONS

What defines a region?

How do they form?

What languages are spoken?

How are they governed?

How does the region relate to another?

How does it differ?

What are the boundaries

RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN PLACES

How do people adapt or respond to the environment?

How do people change the environment to meet their needs?

MOVEMENT

How do people, products, ideas, and information move?

Migration patterns.

Trade/International business.

The information for this figure has been adapted from the following sources:

Geographic Education National Implementation Project.

Geography in Grades 7-12: Themes, Key Ideas, and Learning

Opportunities GENIP, 1989.

Joint Committee on Geographic Education. Guidelines for

Geographic Education: Elementary and Secondary Schools.

Association of American Geographers and National Council

for Geographic Education, 1984.

professional geographic-educators as well as educators of other disciplines for they feel that this set of themes is useful not only in organizing geography courses, but, perhaps more

importantly, in integrating geography into other subjects, thereby contributing to the general education of all students.

An observation of many colleges and universities throughout Pennsylvania and its bordering states has shown that many have eliminated or severely reduced staffing and resources in geography (Dorschner and Marten 1990). As a consequence, most must make do with specialists in other fields--history, political science, cultural anthropology, to name a few--to infuse geographic concepts into their own departmental teaching.

This predicament suggests the need for innovative solutions to combat geographic illiteracy by emphasizing the important link that basic geographic concepts have to the study of history, political science, economics, literature, foreign language and world business, to name a few. The integration of subject matter from one discipline to another can, in my opinion, sharply enhance a student's understanding of the world. More specifically, by infusing certain fundamental concepts (the five themes) of geography into various disciplines, students can more easily relate the subject matter from one discipline to another.

This integrative and global approach to education is occurring at a time when secondary school teachers are reorganizing their programs in order to better equip their students with the basic skills and information necessary in order for them to become independent and self-directed learners. Just as the push for "writing across the curriculum" has attracted serious attention, so may the call for "geography

across the curriculum."

Cutter and Regulska (1987) emphasize that there is a need for schools to provide more in the way of geography training, especially those institutions that do not have complete or "full-fledged" geography programs. They are critical, however, of educators who have little training in geography, yet who are discussing geographic concepts in the classroom. Similarly, Harper (1990) is critical of recent attempts to infuse geographic principles into the general curriculum via the concept of the five themes, which he has termed the "new school geography." Because the five themes, according to Harper, are not geography, they do not fit into the geographic traditions as identified by Pattison (1964) which include physical geography, human ecology, spatial analysis, and regional geography. Harper writes:

While the five themes are most important to geography, they are applicable to history, earth science, conservation or any subject that has a spatial component and so should be part of any general education curriculum, but only implicitly within the framework of each subject being taught. (28)

Ideally, geography should be offered as a separate discipline at all secondary and post-secondary institutions, but this claim should not preclude other educators from utilizing geographic concepts to enhance their own teaching. Although geographers may dispute the themes and their definitions, most agree that they provide an overall understanding of the world,

and that they are crucial to understanding geography. I would suggest that non-geographers still need to be aware of the central themes of geography and should adapt them to their lesson plans. Teachers should be encouraged to attend workshops so they can learn the skills necessary to instill in their students a basic understanding of geographic concepts. Cutter and Regulski have been addressing the problem. Recently, they published resource guides through Rutgers University entitled Putting Geography Into Your Classroom and Fostering Global Thinking: A Geographical Teaching Resource Guide. Both are excellent handbooks which provide teaching modules for use in geography and non-geography courses.

As mentioned earlier, one way to ensure that students are developing global awareness is through the study of culture. Again, Harper states effectively:

The key to global education is understanding
--understanding not the five themes, but the
distinctive rationales of different cultures; ...the
overall links that make possible today's global
economic-political-social system while, at the same
time, producing global environmental problems and
political misunderstandings. Geography alone can
integrate culture and the earth environment in a
contemporary time-frame which provides a perspective
for understanding the complexity of human life from
place to place. (28-29)

Although culture is a topic worthy of study in its own

right, it is generally embedded in the study of other disciplines such as history, art, literature, foreign language, and perhaps more directly, the social sciences (anthropology, sociology, and political science), because each of these disciplines addresses culturally-related issues.

Currently, foreign language educators are reassessing the importance of culture in the foreign language classroom. Many feel that culture must be integrated with the study of language from the onset of instruction if students are to develop life-long sensitivities to foreign cultures (Omaggio 1989 p.359). However, the teaching of culture in the foreign language classroom is unfortunately still relatively ineffective. Many students remain uninformed about other peoples and cultures, not to mention the languages that they speak. Numerous studies, such as those mentioned at the start of this paper, confirm the ignorance that many students show toward cross-cultural differences.

The increasing degree of cultural illiteracy among students may be due in part to the traditional practice of not exposing students to cultural materials until they enter upper-level classes. This practice is perhaps due to a prevailing misconception of what "culture" implies. We need to stress that culture emerges from all the effects of a people's relationship to the land on which it settles. Culture can thus manifest itself in as an infinite number of ways as people can relate to the land. This rather anthropological definition of culture is broad enough to allow us to embrace the range of all aspects of

simple human life; i.e. simple patterns of everyday life to the fine arts and literature.

Omaggio (1989) observes that many foreign language educators are hesitant to teach culture because they feel they are not sufficiently prepared to do so. She asserts that this may be due to the misconception that the teaching of culture--as with geography, one might add--involves imparting a barrage of facts involving place names, strange customs, and other "pieces" of information that are often static and outdated. Furthermore, many teachers, according to Omaggio, are often confused about what aspects of culture to teach and feel the need for some sort of scheme to help them select appropriate cultural content (362). Allen and Valette (1977) remark that teachers will often generalize when they do not have enough data to support their statements or to address students' questions. But as Seeley (1984) maintains, the purpose of teaching culture is to provide students with the basic skills in the analysis and interpretation of cross-cultural differences.

Geography can play an important role in the teaching of culture; it can serve as a foundation for the discussion of many aspects of culture. Typically, however, at least in the foreign language classroom, and perhaps you may see similarities in your own and other disciplines, the treatment of cultural themes is often, as mentioned earlier, sporadic and set apart from the primary focus of teaching grammar. Generally culture is introduced briefly in short lectures or descriptions of the geography of a certain area. Or perhaps the instructor will

quickly identify great works of art and literature. Geography may be discussed in a lecture of this type, but only to highlight specific place names. Students will look at maps and be asked to memorize, for example, the number and names of important rivers in South America, the mountain ranges that traverse Spain, or perhaps some facts about the contrasting agriculture from one region to another. Of course knowing where locations are is very important, but this is only the first step. Most educators would agree that it is more important for students to comprehend the significance of location. As Fuson (1989) asserts, "Learning the names of every place on earth is not geography; it is a means to an end, not the end itself. Location is to geography as date is to history or the alphabet is to language. It is a departure point. And it is a subject that is in constant flux." (vii)

In the literature one finds many inventories for analyzing and describing a culture. A particularly useful one comes from Pfister and Borzilleri (1977). Here, we see many aspects of culture that can become more meaningful by integrating the five themes of geography. If we take for example, the theme of location, we could point out that almost all of the Iberian Peninsula lies between the 36th and 43rd Parallels, lines which pass through the United States and span from northern North Carolina to southern Maine. Madrid, interestingly enough, is as far north as New York City, yet their climates are different. By applying the five themes, we could discuss how the location of a place, be it New York or Madrid may relate to its

distinctive characteristics. The discussion would include human and physical characteristics as well. Also, in discussing a place (Panama Canal-see handout) we might have students read a poem or short story which describes the place from a native inhabitants point of view.

If we are discussing Latin America, a term which is not geographic, but is used to reflect a degree of cultural unity, we can show that geographically there are many regions to which this term can apply. These regions span a vast territory and have many distinguishing physical characteristics. But, despite these differences, we can see that the geography, as varied as it is causes much of the population to settle near coastal areas. By studying the theme of region, and the relationship of this to others, we can better understand what is meant when we refer to someone as a Latin American. And although, Latin America includes Middle and South America, it remains a manageable unit of cultural study.

Although it is beyond the scope of this presentation to demonstrate all the ways that the five themes interrelate, I would like to suggest to you that we can easily supplement cultural studies by integrating the fundamental themes in our lessons. I believe that we must encourage multidisciplinary links. I am witnessing this trend in the foreign language field where many educators are deemphasizing the focus on grammar, and are acknowledging the importance that teaching for cultural understanding has on the students in our programs. I believe that knowledge of the five themes will help us to bring

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coherency and relevance to any discussion of culture.

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